

all. Ultimately, I was left unsure about what practical difference an eschatological pneumatology might make, and found myself longing for some good old-fashioned Barthian christocentrism. This book may indeed prove to be very relevant to the debate over the *filioque* clause. But the final irony is that Beck has convinced me to keep it.

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***Political Engagement as Biblical Mandate*, Paul Hanson,  
Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2010, pp. 167, ISBN  
978-0227172698. £25.50**

The Harvard Divinity School scholar, Paul Hanson, enters a new terrain by writing *Political Engagement as Biblical Mandate*. Best known for his work on Old Testament studies, he now ventures into the modern debate about the relation between religion and politics.

In his introduction, Hanson describes the pervasive modern demand that religion should be checked at the door in public discourse, and expresses worries about the effects of this attitude. This is not to say that he does not recognize the importance of the typical Rawlsian argument which sustains it. He sees the strength of the arguments of liberal political theory, which stresses individual independence and responsibility, and has no desire to side with ‘communitarianism’ in as an opposite strategy. Rather, Hanson hopes to draw out the strengths of both positions, and so attempt to forge ‘a strategy that strikes the delicate balance between confessional integrity and civility’ (35). Hanson states the intention of the book to be twofold: firstly, to argue ‘that religiously informed thought has played and can continue to play a constructive role in the public forum’ (viii); and secondly, to ‘clarify what style of religious argument benefits the common good, respects all religious and moral perspectives, conforms to the laws of host regimes, and produces global accord’ (ibid.). Naturally, his book takes a deliberately U.S.-centred focus, and so works mostly with examples,

discussions and assumptions prevalent in the United States.

The first chapter is the flagship chapter of the book, as it most directly addresses the questions put forth in the introduction. The chapter laments the state of public discussion of the Bible and politics in America, where Republicans use Scripture to support what Hanson perceives to be nationalistic idolatry, and where Democrats seek to minimize altogether the use of religious language in political debate (11). This is one reason why Hanson hopes to show a better way to approach the Bible in relation to politics, and is searching for a ‘hermeneutic [...] that will be faithful to biblical heritage while yet sensitive to the legal and cultural norms of society characterized by religious and philosophical diversity’ (12).

To this end Hanson looks at politics as portrayed in the scriptures, and focuses primarily upon Old Testament images. In the attempt to show the diversity of political engagement in the scriptures, he lists six biblical models of politics to be found in the Old Testament, and comments upon them: ‘We are deployed not with a timeless blueprint in hand, but with the example of ancestors in the faith who responded to the call of covenant partnership in an ever-changing world’ (32). Hanson then draws from these models three principles of responsibility vis-à-vis society and government, which can be paraphrased as follows: firstly, that politics are relativized under a vision of God’s universal reign; secondly, that the Church is to represent and advocate God’s reign to government; and thirdly, that this will be done by critique, admonition and support, uncompromised by penultimate claims such as patriotism, but respectful of the constitutional principles of a legitimately-constituted host state (33).

On this basis, Hanson proceeds to list ‘a five-step hermeneutic for a biblical based political theology’ which he considers can guide the Christian’s political engagement. The first step entails being conscious of God’s ultimate authority over the derived authority of political institutions. It then involves being fully informed of one’s own scriptural/confessional tradition, so one can navigate skilfully between that and contemporary realities. The third step is the cultivation the skill of translating the moral principles derived from faith into reasonable discourse. Fourthly, it is necessary to listen attentively to people of different worldviews. And lastly, the Christian

must understand that the courage and patience needed for the task come from worship and eschatological hope (36–38).

In this first chapter Hanson has therefore laid out the substantial answer he wants to give to the questions posed in the introduction. But how does all this translate into concrete political action? Hanson uses the first commandment, ‘You shall have no gods before me’, as an example of how this might work in the practical political arena. This commandment, he contends, might mean that an alternative to the notion of ‘the autonomy of the marketplace’ in economics has to be constructed. It might further entail the denouncing of policies which prioritize tax cuts for companies over education and health care, etc. (39–40). There is therefore an easily-recognisable communitarian ‘tilt to the left’ brought about by Hanson’s application of his own hermeneutical principles. However, one might wonder what it is about these principles that so firmly suggests that prioritizing state-funded health care over tax cuts for corporations is the right thing to do. It does not seem all that obvious that there is any necessary connection between his interpretation of the first commandment and this conclusion, any more than there is between Hanson’s positive, but diplomatic, affirmation of the more conservative attitudes of ‘family values’ and ‘individual integrity’. What precisely makes ‘the autonomy of the marketplace’ a false god, where ‘family values’ is not?

Chapters 2 and 3 contain interesting explorations of the notions of worship and covenant. Here Hanson suggests that worship is an important wellspring of Christian action, for it is here that the virtues of covenantal relationships are nourished and sustained. This argument benefits greatly from Hanson’s exploration of the prophet Isaiah and the role of worship in his political engagement. Furthermore, these two chapters sound an alarm at the identity crises of today’s world, where once deep-rooted communal and covenantal virtues are being replaced by ‘unencumbered self’. Accordingly, in Chapter 4 Hanson moves on to the limitations of various Western approaches to the Christian faith. He especially critiques both the introspective personalism prevalent in American Christianity, and the other-worldly apocalypticism which refuses to address the problem of this-worldly suffering. These two positions Hanson finds to be biblically unfounded, and

to exacerbate the problems he has described. Throughout the book, therefore, Hanson attempts to show how the scriptures should arouse the Christian to action, particularly political action, and that narrowly individual or nationalistic perspectives should be replaced by a more universal, global concern for justice.

As regards Hanson's declared aim for the book, it is one that is very important for the United Kingdom as well as for the United States. He is without doubt right that the divide between political liberalism and communitarianism (which we might translate loosely as 'right' and 'left' in our politics) needs to be bridged or transcended. Of course, Hanson's book is unlikely to accomplish this single-handedly. However, at no point does Hanson promise to solve the problems of political government in this one book. He describes the book rather as 'a "trial balloon" sent out into the open skies of public discourse' (viii).

What Hanson does do is bring great resources from his longstanding engagement with biblical texts, and marry these with his deep understanding of the problems and opportunities of the modern world. As such, this short and accessible book should be welcomed by all who are interested in the question of the fundamental relations between faith and politics.

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***God and the Art of Happiness: An Offering of Pastoral Doctrinal Theology*, Ellen T. Charry, Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011, pp. 316, ISBN 978-0802860323. £23.99**

Like its principle subject, Ellen Charry's *God and the Art of Happiness* saves its best rewards for those who are prepared to work. This is a magisterial offering from Charry who builds deep foundations from a historical tour of happiness, before constructing 'asherism' – a